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INCANTATIONS AND POPULAR HEALING IN MARYLAND AND PENNSYLVANIA.¹

LAST autumn I had the opportunity of making personal observations amongst the people living in the mountain valleys of western Maryland and Pennsylvania, and especially as to their ways of affording relief in many bodily ailments. It is most interesting to see the entire faith of the country patients in their sometimes called witch doctors, and the quiet acquiescence of some of the town folks in these practices. In Pennsylvania the practice is called "powwow;" in Maryland it is spoken of as "trying for it," and there is no doubt that the Maryland incantations are borrowed from the German; indeed, positive proof of this is found in South Mountain, the home of magic (of this species) in Maryland. One instance that came under my personal observation of the powwow was of a respectable and trusted workman, a foreman of a gang of ten or twelve men. He lives in a nice, clean little mountain home, and is a well-to-do man. Last autumn he got a cinder in his eye, which became very much inflamed and troublesome. The gentleman whose duty it was to inspect his work noticed its condition, and said, "Jim, I think you'd better see a doctor about that eye." Jim replied, "I don't want to see no doctor, but if I can get two days off, I'll go across the mountain, and get my eye powwowed; that's better than any doctor." The desired permission was given, and Jim set off on his two days' tramp across the mountain. He returned on time, and the eye was soon all right. He would tell nothing of the treatment, and the most that could be had from him was "she said words."

These mountain people, wherever I have met them along the Atlantic slope, are the same. They will talk to you all day about your affairs, but in an inoffensive way; of their own they are exceedingly reticent. They are sensitive, and above all things afraid of ridicule. Whenever it has been possible, I have gone amongst them, finding them a most interesting study, a strange mixture of contradictory characteristics. I have generally found that they will talk to me, and after some lengthy and embarrassing pauses or rather gaps in the conversation in the early part of the visit, I would often receive many confidences before leaving. I think the key to this has been that they saw I was genuinely sorry for them, and so I am, for the women especially. Their patchwork is their sole indulgence. I was so fortunate as to obtain from a most accomplished weaver of quilt pieces and spells much information upon "trying for it" and some of her "words." She was a gentle,

¹ Paper read before the Maryland Folk-Lore Society.

quiet-spoken woman, living in her own thick-walled stone house, very comfortably surrounded, and supplied by all that was yielded from a well-cared-for place of several acres. She practised her faith, and to her it was truly a faith.

I asked her if she made any effort to place her will in submission and supplication when she "tried for it." She looked at me in surprise, and said very seriously, "If I did n't do that, I could n't cure. That's the way I do it." She then complained, almost to tears, that "some people thought she did it in other ways, and said she was a witch, and nothing hurt her as bad as that." She had perfect faith in her powers and her formulas, and told me instance after instance where she had "tried for it," and accomplished the cure. A few typical ones I will give you. "Mostly her cases were for liver-grownd children." I asked her to tell me the meaning of this term. She explained, "when they are cross and peaky, and don't grow, just cry all the time." "A wheal in the eye" was another, as in the powwowed eye in Pennsylvania; also all kinds of hemorrhage. "Botts in horses," I asked. "Oh, yes, often cured them and burns and cuts of all kinds." She could always blow the fire out. The practice of treating burns by words, blowing, and movements of the hands, is very general in the mountains, and I have always been able to trace it to German origin.

Not long since a visitor in a house where I was staying was very anxious "to try for it" on an inmate of the house, who had been badly burned, but in this case the family physician had forestalled him. Words often used are these:—

"Clear out, brand, but never in. Be thou cold or hot, thou must cease to burn. May God guard thy blood, thy flesh, thy marrow, and thy bones, and every artery, great and small. They all shall be guarded and protected in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Erysipelas can be cured by taking a red hot brand from the fire, and passing it three times over the person's face, saying the words. This ordeal by fire was not fancied by some of the patients, so my witch told me; she sometimes put coals on a shovel, and waved it over the face, saying, —

"Three holy men went out walking,
They did bless the heat and the burning,
They blessed that it might not increase,
They blessed that it might quickly cease,
And guard against inflammation and mortification
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

My witch was especially proud of her ability to stop hemorrhages, and here comes in the absent treatment. She said it was not neces-

sary for her to see the patients ; they might be far away. Only the first name must be known and pronounced exactly, also the side of the body from which the blood came, the right or left side ; this was essential. "She always stopped it." Not long before I talked with her, she had been called between midnight and morning to go to a young man some miles away, who was bleeding severely. He had had a number of teeth extracted, and when the messenger left was "pretty near dead ;" nothing stopped the blood. She asked for the necessary information (his name, and which side of the mouth was bleeding), then told the messenger to go back, — she would "try for it." When he reached home, the bleeding had stopped, and when she inquired the time of relief, found it was just after she had said her words. Two formulas for stopping bleeding are :—

On Christ's grave grows three roses ;
The first is kind,
The second is valued among rulers,
The third stops blood.

Stop, blood, thou must, and, wound, thou must heal,
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Another charm : As soon as cut, say, "Blessed wound, blessed hour, blessed be the day on which Christ was born. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Not so fortunate as my witch were some other practitioners of this method, as related to me by a prominent physician of a city near by. In reply to my question, whether he saw anything of their customs, he assured me that I would be astonished at some of the people who used them. One case he related was of a woman who lived a few miles out in the country, and who had violent bleeding from the head. A young boy who was thought to have great powers of cure was called in to "try for it," but failed to relieve the visibly sinking woman. Dr. A. was summoned, and with much difficulty succeeded in arresting the trouble. For some days she improved, but the hemorrhages returning, the boy was sent for ; some hours were lost "trying for it," and upon failure, Dr. A. was again called and arrived in time to see her die. More fortunate was another of Dr. A.'s patients who was ill with erysipelas. He was a man in middle life, a thriving merchant, educated and intelligent. He followed the doctor's directions with fidelity, and recovered, but not to Dr. A. belonged the undivided honors of healing. The fire brands and the words had been used *sub rosa*, and "of course they helped."

After my second or third visit to the gentle witch, who was pretty, rosy, and plump, she told me how she had learnt to "try for it." When a child she had been adopted by an aunt who had married a "Ger-

man man," and he had taught her how to use the words, how to speak them, how to move her hands (much value is attached to the movements of the hands), and, dying, bequeathed her his precious book. She showed me the book, which had been translated from the German in 1820. The preface stated that the translator had put it into English greatly against his wife's wish, but he was old, he had no one to leave his book to, and he did not wish his wonderful knowledge to die with him, and accordingly translated it into English, which was generally spoken about him.

My witch would not part with her book. No, she must leave it to her daughter. She *could* not sell it; money could not buy it. If she had no daughter, she would give it to me, but could not sell it. I might study it all I wanted, but she could not part with it. All blandishments failed, and I came away without the book, but she told me of an old man who had another copy. A long drive to his home yielded the same result. Since then I have instituted a search, but no other copy has yet been found. I am still looking for it.

I will add a few more spells of interest. One for making a divining rod is as follows: In the first night of Christmas, between eleven and twelve o'clock, break off from any tree a young twig of one year's growth, in the three highest names, facing toward sunrise. Whenever you apply this wand in searching for iron, ore, or water, apply it three times. The twig must be forked, and each end of the fork must be held in each hand, so the third and thickest end must stand up, but don't hold it up too tight. Strike the ground with the thickest end, and that which you desire will appear immediately, if there is any in the ground where you strike. The words to be spoken are as follows: "Archangel Gabriel, I conjure thee in the name of God the Almighty to tell me if there is any water here or not. Do tell me." If you wish iron or ore, use either word in place of water. Other words to be spoken, when breaking the twig, are: "Divining wand, do thou keep that power that God gave thee in the very first hour." In case any one wishes to use "words," and "trying for it" in fever, the following method is efficacious: "Good morning, dear Thursday. Take away from (mention the name) the seventy-seven-fold fevers. Oh! thou dear Lord Jesus Christ, take them away from him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." This must be used on Thursday for the first time, on Friday for the second time, and on Saturday for the third time. Each time the prayer of faith is to be said thrice, and not a word dare to be spoken to any one until the sun be risen. Neither dare the sick person speak to any one until after sunrise, nor eat pork nor drink milk, nor cross running water for nine days.

The examples which have been given serve to exhibit the prevalence of credulity and superstition. That systematic plans for working upon superstitious beliefs find victims as numerous as at any earlier time would be further illustrated by a collection of clippings from daily papers; a few such, taken from the columns of the "Baltimore Sun" during the past year, may be cited, as further indications that confidence in signs, charms, and omens is much more general among partly educated people than we are willing to believe.

In the "Sun" of November last was a two-column notice of alleged impositions practised upon the public at large by a mental priestess of shrewd business capacity, who, according to the "Chicago Record-Herald," has been at the head of one of the most gigantic frauds ever operated in America. She was first heard of in Chicago, moved to Georgia, and some time, soon after 1893, settled in Florida, but is little known in that State. Her patients were obtained through advertising in papers in other parts of the country, stating she could cure all ills. Circulars sent on application promised relief from blindness, deafness, consumption, heart disease, even poverty, and all for three to five dollars a week, or five to ten dollars a month. It was not necessary to see her, only to make a union of thought with her. She directed the patients to go to some quiet spot at a designated time, divest their minds of all cares in the world, and centre their thoughts on the curer, Mrs. Williams, in her home at Seabreeze, Fla. The patient had only to believe in her, and from her ideal brain and vigorous health the overflow was sufficient to cure all who made themselves subjective to her influence. Thousands of persons wrote to her, — money came pouring in. An entry in her books in 1897 showed a jump in receipts from nine hundred to three thousand dollars a month, with a side-note on the margin, "this is pretty good business." Subsequent entries evidenced receipts from five thousand to eight thousand dollars a month.

The patients wrote from all parts of the United States, Canada, British Columbia, England, South Africa, Australia, Ireland, Germany, and France, the demands for cure running the gamut of human ills. According to this clipping, in six or seven years the nice little sum of a million dollars was amassed, net profit from thought, connection, and credulity. It seemed almost a pity that at this juncture the Post Office Department should cruelly interfere with the exercise of this lady's remarkable monetary talents by issuing a fraud order, and stopping all mail addressed to her. After further legal proceedings, she was arraigned for trial at Jacksonville, Fla., at the December term. In prosecuting her the Government will not attack mental science as a science, but will endeavor to

prove her one aim was to secure money, and that the imaginations of her patients were the only things that might give them relief from the thousand and one ills they asked her to cure.

While this comedy of painful absurdity above referred to was being played in this country, a transaction of similar nature, but with darker fanatical features, was being enacted in London. The papers of October 11, 1901, mention the continued hearing of the charge against Theodore and Laura Jackson, better known as Horus and Ann O'Delia Diss Debar, who have conspired to defraud women of money and jewelry by fortune-telling, Theodore claiming he was Christ returned to earth.

On the same date, October 11, is a strange story from Louisville, Ky. A physician, Alfred C. Lemberger by name, was called to see a child whom he pronounced suffering from diphtheria. He filled the requirements of the law, placarded the house, and enforced sanitary measures to which the family bitterly objected. Later the child died, after which one of the family visited the doctor "to wish him ill," saying, "within nine days your fine mare will die, the colt that you value will also die, your last hunting dog will disappear, and then you will die." So far the story was told by the doctor, at a small card club of which he was a member, withholding the woman's name. In due time, the colt, dog, and mare died and disappeared, and on the evening of the ninth day, Dr. Lemberger fell dead of heart disease. Physicians say that the woman probably caused the man's death by psychic force.

Passing to humbler walks of life, in November a poor, old woman sitting by her window in her lonely mountain cabin at Big Otter, Clay Co., Va., was fired on and instantly killed. A man arrested on suspicion confessed to the deed, claiming that at different times during the past three months he had been ridden by her all over Clay and Calhoun counties in witch fashion. On one occasion the old lady's house appeared to him to be a blacksmith's forge, and he was compelled to shoe his horse there at night. On a certain time the witch appeared and told him that "that would be the last time he would ever shoe his horse," and in a day or two afterward the horse died.

From Shamokin, Pa., comes a story of how Dr. Jacob Shuck treated an old lady by killing a black cat in the cellar, saying it had ninety-nine devils in it, and while it lived, he could not break the enchantment that encircled the sick woman. His intelligent treatment did not save the life of the patient, and Dr. Shuck is now charged with practising witchcraft.

In a recent number of the "Sun" is related the woes of Cara Merklem, whose appearance justified the accusation under which she

was suffering, of being a witch, but which she denies, and says she is only a plain washerwoman. Living in the house with her is a Greek family with a very ill baby, the probable death of which Cara is accused of causing by her evil eye. To the family this is perfectly evident and proven, for a week before it was well and happy, and Cara picked it up from the floor, saying, "Oh, what a pretty baby!" Now, in passing again through their rooms, the distressed father and mother seized Cara, and shook her, and would not let her go until she would spit in the sick baby's face, thus annulling the influence of her evil eye. Fearful of her life, in case the child died, Cara sought advice and protection in the Southern police station.

In January there was great excitement in "little Italy," in New York, over a devil child who inherited a curse, was currently reported to have horns, green eyes that flashed fire, cloven feet, and, when only two days old, was known to have caused the death of a child next door, whose throat bore the marks of tiny impish fingers.

About the same time a similar report was in circulation in Baltimore, but a visit to the maligned infant developed the fact that it was in no way different from other children a few days old.

It has been considered as beyond the province of this paper to touch upon negro superstitions ; if any one notices the daily papers, he will see that it is exceptional when something cannot be found bearing on the subject.

Letitia Humphreys Wrenshall.

BALTIMORE, MD.